

“The Seafarer,” translated by Burton Raffel

“The Wanderer,” translated by Charles Kennedy

“The Wife’s Lament,” translated by Ann Stanford

Literary Analysis: Anglo-Saxon Lyric Poetry

Anglo-Saxon poetry was recited or chanted aloud to an audience by wandering poets. In order to make the poems easier to listen to and to be memorized, they were developed with strong rhythms. Each line has a certain number of beats, or accented syllables—almost always four. Many lines have a **caesura**, or pause, in the middle, after the second beat. Anglo-Saxon poetry also contained **kennings**, two-word metaphorical names for familiar things. Note these examples of rhythm, caesura, and kennings in these lines:

Rhythm: No hárps ríng in his héart, nó rewárd

Caesura: No pássion for wómen, [pause] no wórlldly pléasures

Kenning: Nóthing, only the oceán’s heáve

1. Mark the syllables that have a strong accented beat (´) in these lines from “The Seafarer.”

But there isn’t a man on earth so proud,
So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,
Grown so brave, or so graced by God
That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl.

2. In the lines in passage 1, how many caesuras are there? Write the word that appears before each caesura.

3. Mark each syllable that has a strong accented beat (´) in these lines from “The Seafarer.”

Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead.
The weakest survives and the world continues,
Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished.

4. Underline the kenning in these lines from “The Wife’s Lament.”

First my lord went out away from his people
over the wave-tumult. I grieved each dawn
wondered where my lord my first on earth might be.